

# Using Focus Groups in Program Evaluation

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Part I  
**Using focus groups**  
Part II  
**Developing the research plan**  
Part III  
**Logistics**  
Part IV  
**Facilitating focus groups**

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Part I  
**Using Focus Groups**

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## What Is a Focus Group?

An excellent way to discuss topics of interest, interactively, in-depth, with a small number of carefully selected people

- About 2 hours long
- About 6 – 10 participants
- Common experience or characteristic
- Explore experiences and attitudes

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## What a Focus Group Is Not

- An interview
- A poll
- A survey

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## Satisfaction Surveys vs. Focus Groups

- How do you know what questions to ask?
- How do you know if you have the wrong questions?

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## What Are Your Questions?

Neighborhood Legal Services of LA,  
2005

- Why did you come to the center?
- Was it hard to locate?

Alaska Legal Services Corporation, 2004

- To what extent do users find the self-paced presentations/modules easy to use?

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## How Can YOU Use Feedback?

- Assessment and improvement
- Grant proposal
- Fulfill grant requirement

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Part II

## Research Plan

Getting Started

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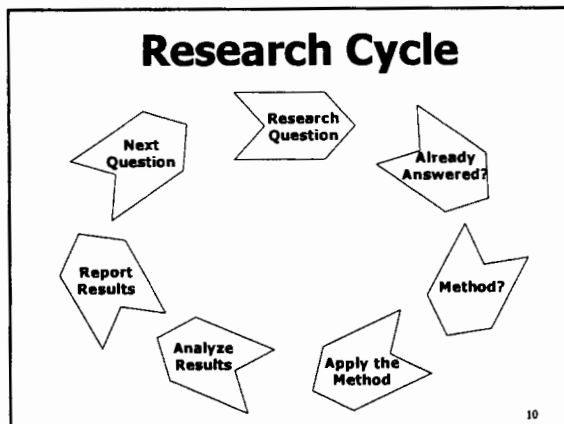
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### Research Questions

Your research question dictates many of your research decisions

- Topics (3 – 5)
- Follow-up questions

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### Participants/Focus Groups

Your participants should be the best qualified to get at your research questions

- Who?
- How many?

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## Recruiting Participants

### Intensive, Not Passive

- Intercept
- Telephone
- Mail
- Email

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## Research Plan (Cont'd)

- Incentives
- Informed consent
- Staff
- Taping
- Group location
- Analysis
- Timeline
- Budget

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## Record Keeping

Keep meticulous notes!

- Reason behind research
- Development of research plan
- Participants vs. recruitments
- Demographic data
- Recruitment process
- Obstacles

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### Part III

## Logistics

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## Staff Roles

- Facilitator
- Note-taker
- Timekeeper
- Partners

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## Supplies

What you need at every focus group:

- Informed consent/confidentiality statement
- Focus group guide
- Tape recorder, tapes, batteries
- Notepaper, pens, tablet/butcher paper, markers
- Snacks for participants

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## Focus Group Starts at 6pm

- 5:30—You arrive
- 5:50—Set out food
- 6:00—People start arriving
- 6:00-6:15—Small talk, eating
- 6:15—Formal introductions
- 6:20—Start the discussion
- 7:40—Final comments or questions
- 7:50—Wrap up

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## Part IV

# Facilitating Focus Groups

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## Facilitators

- Style—more or less involved
- Same style—if you have more than one facilitator
- Neutral/unbiased/non-judgmental

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## Facilitator Tips

- Let participants know they are the experts
- Avoid leading participants—be warm, but value-neutral
- Be careful with empathetic responses that might lead them to believe there are right and wrong answers
- Ask only one question at a time, even if other questions are related
- Let people follow a full train of thought, even if they are answering several questions

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## Facilitator Tips (Cont'd)

- Keep track of questions that have been answered out of order, so that you are not redundant
- Frequently repeat key phrases, since participants may lose track after 2 or 3 others have responded
- Summarize a participant's response and use a vocal inflection that signifies closure
- Be comfortable with silence—count to 10 before you jump in
- If all else fails, use the "magic wand" question

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## Probing Questions

- Would you give me an example?
- Can you elaborate on that idea?
- Can you tell me more about that?
- Would you explain that further?
- I'm not sure I understand what you're saying...
- Is there anything else?
- That's really interesting, have other people had that experience?
- Is that the way it usually is?

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## Common Characters

As a facilitator, what might you expect walking in to a group

- Silence
- The Opinionator
- The Angry One(s)
- The Quiet One(s)

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## References/Resources

American Statistical Association. (1997). What are focus groups? Section on Survey Research Methods, ASA.

Morgan, David L. (1988). Focus groups as qualitative research, Newbury Park: Sage Publications: Qualitative research methods series.

Morgan, David L. (1998). The focus group kit: The focus group guidebook, London: Sage Publications.

ReCAPP: Theories and approaches: Focus group guidelines, <http://www.etr.org/recapp/theories/ProgramEvaluation/FGGuidelines.htm>

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